

Wyoming Department of Agriculture

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The Wyoming Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources and quality of life.



Dave Freudenthal, Governor
Jason Fearnough, Director

July 6, 2009

Division of Policy and Directives Management
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222
Arlington, VA 22203
Attn: FWS-RS-ES-2009-0021

Dear U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the Notice of 90-Day Finding on a Petition to List the American Pika as Threatened or Endangered with Critical Habitat by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (Service).

Our comments are specific to our mission within state government: dedication to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As this proposal has major impacts upon our agriculture industry, our natural resources and the welfare of our citizens, we believe it is important you continue to inform us of proposed actions and decisions and provide us the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA is disappointed the Service is yet again devoting the time, money and energy towards this unwarranted petition to list the American pika (pika) as threatened or endangered. We understand the Service is seeking additional scientific information to assist in the 12-month status review. While the WDA does not have scientific research on pika, we are writing in strong opposition of the Service considering listing the species.

The petitioner, Center for Biological Diversity, (Center) has submitted a petition based entirely on hypothetical events, contradicting statements and unproven scientific data. The following statements prove the Center is grasping for straws to list the pika and actually contradicts themselves in their petition.

- *"The IPCC concluded that global climate change is occurring and is caused by human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels and clearing of forests (Forester et al. 2007, pp 135 – 136)"*
- *"a second possible community change is the loss of alpine meadow habitat caused by forest encroachment."* The Center believe the clearing of forests is causing global warming, however, they then believe forest encroachment is causing a reduction in pika habitat. We will not support the Service warranting a listing based on these contradictions.
- *"demonstrating the invasion of forests into alpine meadow habitat across various mountain ranges during the 20th century."* Pika are typically found above treeline and not in meadows surrounded by conifers.
- *"fire suppression may contribute to the encroachment of trees into alpine and subalpine meadows, also altering vegetation communities to a less favorable state."* We believe the

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Center is among one of many environmental organizations who sue the Federal Government and National Forest Service for their proposed prescribed fires, manual thinning or simply allowing large wildfires to naturally take their course due to possible endangerment of wildlife. Throughout the West, pine bark beetles have killed thousands of acres of conifers. This large die off of trees will eventually burn and naturally create a new mosaic of forests and wildlife habitat.

- *"global climate change may affect the formation and maintenance of talus habitat. Alpine permafrost conditions provide the necessary freeze-thaw events to form talus habitat..."* According to The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition Copyright© 2004, talus is defined as *deposit of rock fragments detached from cliffs or mountain slopes by weathering and piled up at their bases*. Weathering is then defined as: *collective term for the processes by which rock at or near the earth's surface is disintegrated and decomposed by the action of atmospheric agents, water, and living things. Some of these processes are mechanical, e.g., the expansion and contraction caused by sudden, large changes in temperature, the expansive force of water freezing in cracks, the splitting caused by plant roots, and the impact of running water; others are chemical, e.g., oxidation, hydration, carbonization, and loss of chemical elements by solution in water*. We believe weathering will continue in many forms and in turn, create additional talus habitat for pika.

We support the Service in their dismissal of the possible reason to list pika due to excessive livestock grazing in pika habitat. The Center believes *"pika habitat evolved free of intense grazing pressure, but this habitat has now become attractive grazing sites for livestock, resulting in losses of native vegetation and meadow degradation."* This statement is not only untrue, but scientifically invalidated. Pika habitat is also prime habitat for mountain goat, big horn sheep and elk, however, livestock are blamed and listing a species such as the pika is one method for the Center and other environmental organizations to remove livestock grazing from public lands. Should the Center succeed in listing the pika, and livestock are removed, livestock operations will go out of business and large tracts of private lands will then be sold and subdivided, only to cause fragmentation and removal of wildlife habitat for other species.

The Center's petition continues to hypothetically propose the pika's existence is in danger by statements such as the following: *"changing climatic conditions may make the American pika more vulnerable to both predators and disease, because evolutionary adaptations and constraints will no longer safeguard individuals."* We appreciate the Service finding this statement speculative and again lacking scientific information. Throughout the petition, the Center uses the words "may" or "could," which is unacceptable. Unless neutral, scientifically, peer-reviewed science is validating any of these concerns we cannot support any of the Center's concerns.

The Center's petition is strongly tied to global warming and the impact humans have on pika habitat. The United States government can work with other countries to reduce pollution and carbon emissions, but cannot demand global regulations or write global legislation. Citizens of America are supportive of wildlife, open spaces and the natural resources, but we cannot misuse worldwide global warming as an excuse or tool to continue abusing the intended purpose of the

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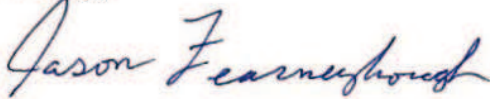
Pika

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Endangered Species Act. The WDA strongly urges the Service to find a "not warranted for listing as threatened or endangered."

We thank the Service for accepting our comments and urge your agency to continue to keep us informed of the current status of the pika.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jason Fearneyhough". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jason" and last name "Fearneyhough" clearly legible.

Jason Fearneyhough

Director

JE/jw

Cc: Governor's Planning Office
WDA Board of Agriculture
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union
Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Game and Fish Department